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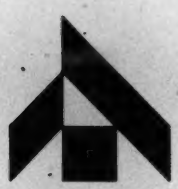
General

JOHNFERRO

University Art Gallery, State University of New York at Albany

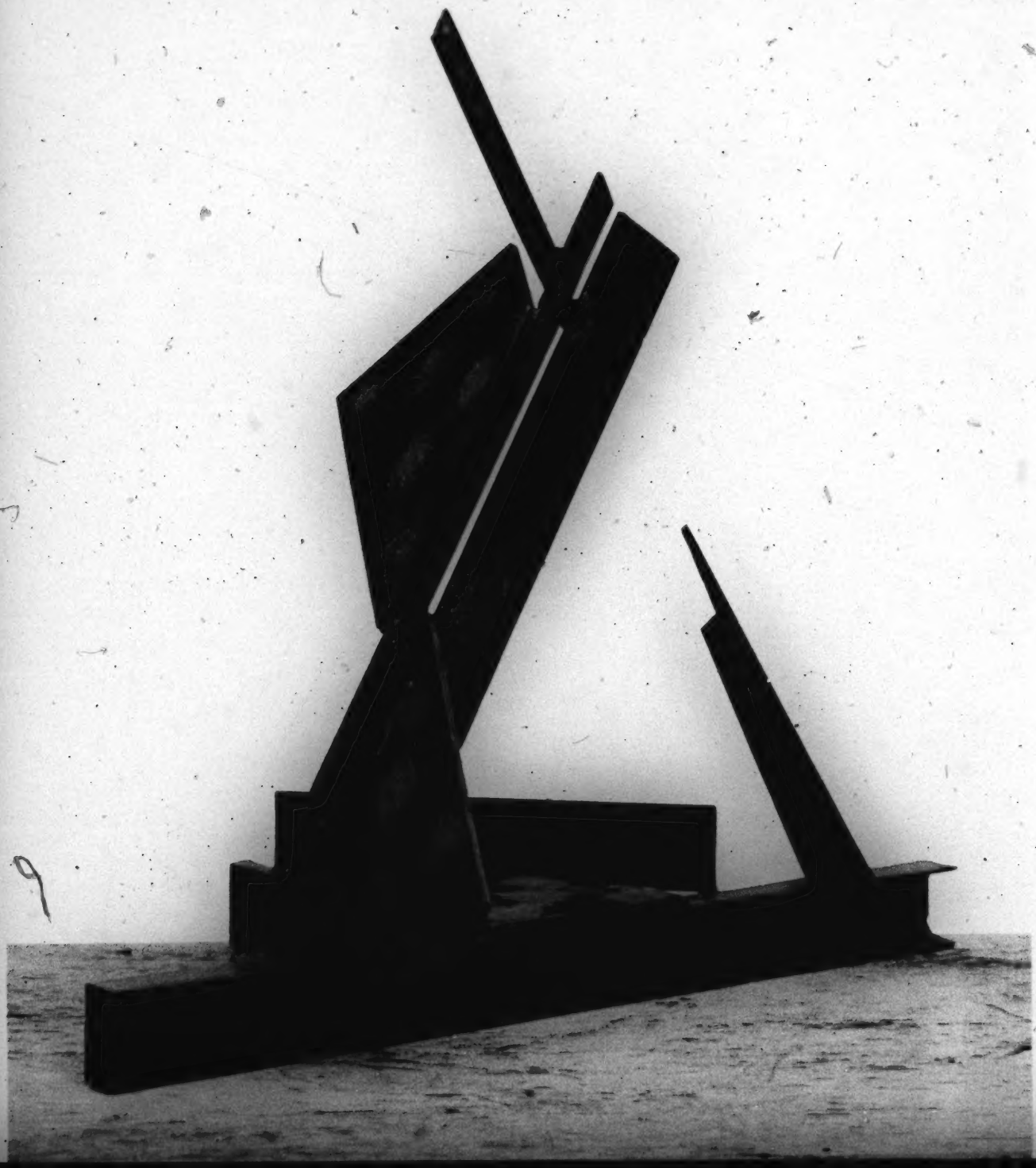


University Art Gallery
State University of New York
at Albany

October 3 through November 7, 1976

Opposite: X Construction #2
1974, steel, 105 X 106 X 26 inches

Prop Pick, 1975, steel, 33 X 36 X 23 inches



The Sculpture of John Ferro

Peter Morrin

THE muscularity of John Ferro's sculpture serves as an indication of the strength in steel constructions. The large upright structures in this exhibition have a look of industrial efficiency—their components are existing manufactured materials, and they are joined by conventional bolted systems. The sculptures' outstretched stance suggests the purposeful spanning of a rectangular area. It is typical of Ferro's directness that he uses bilateral or approximate symmetry as the most economical means to achieve internal equilibrium. This symmetry also enforces an optimal frontal viewpoint, from which the sculptures seem enframed in circles or rectangles. From a three-quarters view, however, the arms of the sculpture suddenly become spatially dynamic, and angle aggressively forward. The poses of the sculptures change from reminiscences of Leonardo's circumscribed study of the ideal proportions of a standing man to the threatening crouch of a boxer.

Ferro's sculptures are basically diagrammatic. Typically, they make very slender claims on space and are open and linear. This concentration of energy along clear paths provides immediate authority to the principal thrusts of his compositions, but also allows the subtlety of subsequent interpretations. In the absence of large areas of mass, the viewer must extend the sculpture in his imagination. For instance, the notching in *Slant* suggests the notion of shapes being fitted into the sculpture in areas established by the notches and the contours of the piece. A multitude of triangles, rectangles, and trapezoids are thereby provided with a potential location, as if the sculpture were a matrix for interchangeable parts.

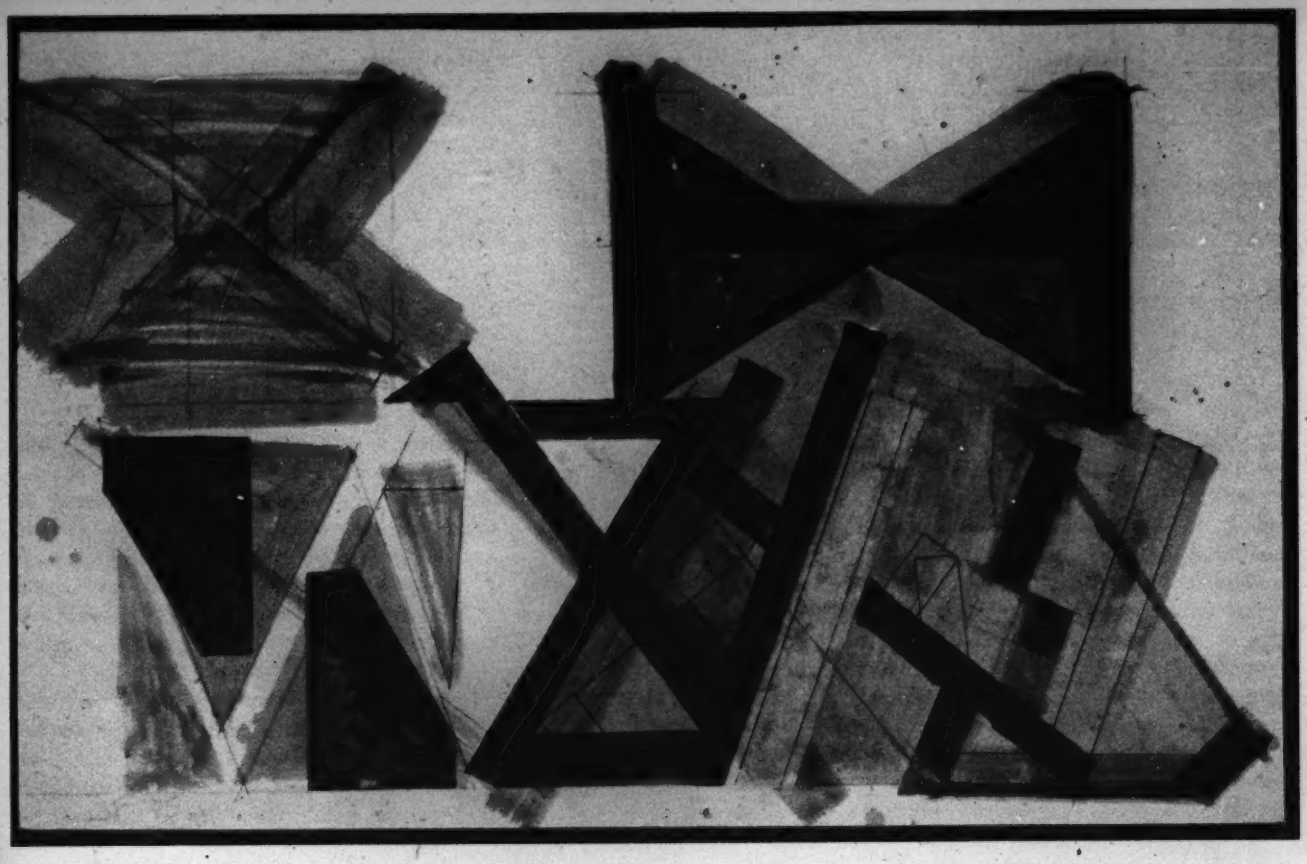
The artist's obvious fondness for diagonals is another aspect of the diagrammatic character of his work. The use of diagonals reaching across the longest dimension of a rectangular field promotes a quick legibility of the sculptures. Rising sideways, so to speak, the sculptures neither soar upward nor do they remain earthbound, but take the position of mediating between vertical and horizontal states.

Some of the smaller sculptures have a more complex diagrammatic quality. *Jack-in-the-Pulpit* is a case in point. From the front of the sculpture a V base and a combination of arrow shapes describe a figure like a diving predatory bird. Moving further to one side, one discovers that a folded plate not only serves to deflect the downward rush of movement, but also hides a sharp division in what had appeared to be a continuous parallelogram. The sculpture no longer gives a sense of a sharp descent, but builds upward towards a cantilevered signal-like shape. These distinctions are not explicit; they arise from walking around the sculpture and from the accumulated knowledge provided by different viewpoints.

The diagrammatic nature of Ferro's sculpture is further exhibited in the cast bronzes. These begin with cut sheets of wax which are bonded together with a soldering iron. They are subsequently cast, using the lost wax process. By employing a hot iron to join the wax planes, the artist is able to maintain a Constructivist character, which is usually lost when open form sculpture is transposed into bronze.

Spring Relief shows some of the virtues of this method. Involved faceting becomes possible because of the ease of working the material. In *Spring Relief*, a part-to-part ordering of pyramidal forms rises on two sides to support a narrow bridging platform. As a result, an open checkmark appears punched through the sloping walls. The open perforation relieves the massiveness of the angled pillars, and suggests repetition of the external profile of the sculpture. In the bridging movement there are intimations of an interior space. This serves an important dramatic function: Ferro's small sculpture frequently suggests a stage space for fantasy, and the projection of this imaginative possibility depends on the availability of an interior within which the fantasy is enacted. The sculptor tempers this illusion by slanting the available spaces, and by concentrating on a free interchange between interior and exterior areas. Nonetheless, some illusion of a model for a monumental gate remains. The bronzes are by far Ferro's most personal work, and have been influenced in part by David Smith's small surrealist pieces in the early '50's.

In hinting at interior space in *Spring Relief*, Ferro capitalizes on the nature of relief sculpture to suggest three-dimensionality. As effective an exchange of space and mass takes



Diagonal City, 1975, drawing, 24 X 38 inches
opposite: Slant, 1976, steel, 90 X 96 X 15 inches

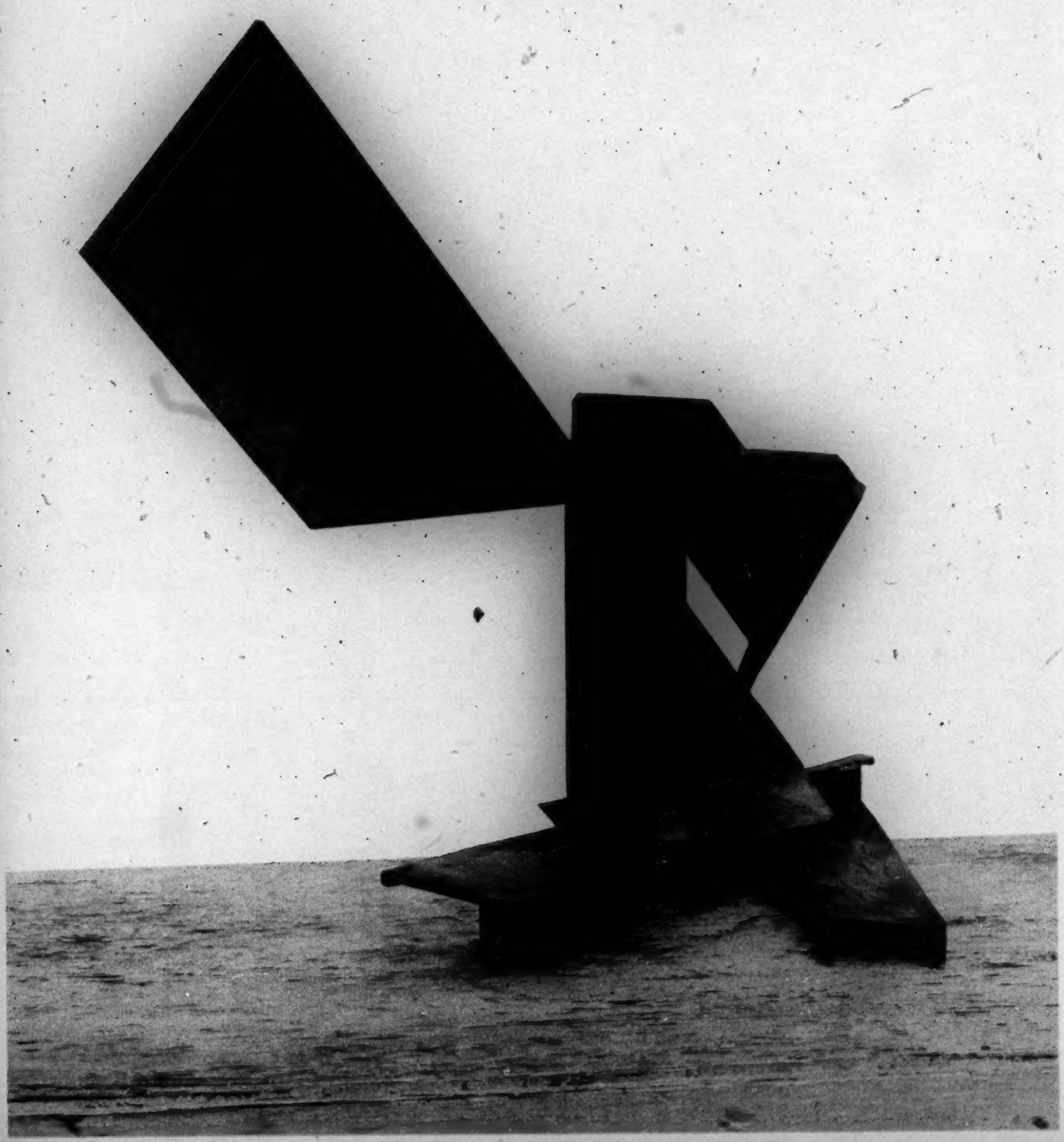
place in this work as could ever be devised in fully three-dimensional configurations. The success of these solutions is beginning to be felt in the larger structures, and *Cascade*, the most recent steel construction, works enclosures against open linear paths of movement.

Ferro's sculptural illusions usually take place between slow and quick perceptions of the work. His sculptures also act as springboards for specific kinds of imaginative projection, either involving completion of the structure, envisioning a function for it, or placing an event within the precincts of the space. He doesn't keep his audience at bay from the sculpture, but encourages the extensions of form and meaning outlined by the objects.

Another observer is likely to find different criteria for admiring John Ferro's productions. The feelings of strength and optimism generated by his work are probably as important as any qualities which may be elucidated by formal analysis. His sculptures are energetic and appealing, and show the artist's pride in his craft.

■ Peter Morrin is Director of the Vassar College Art Gallery, where he teaches American Art and 20th century Art. He received his A.B. degree from Harvard University in 1968, and has done graduate work at Princeton, where he has a dissertation on Hans Hoffman in progress. After study in England and Germany, he worked on a Smithsonian Research Fellowship at the National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington in 1973-74.

Jack-in-the-Pulpit, 1975, steel, 32 X 42 X 13 inches



JOHN FERRO

90 Degree Construction, 1972, steel, 24 X 65 X 65 inches

Mustang, 1972, steel, 16 X 89 X 29 inches

John Ferro

Jack-in-the-Pulpit and Prop Pick

John Ferro

1942
born in Cortland, New York

1962-64
Columbus School of Art, Columbus Ohio

1968
B.F.A. Kansas Art Institute
Kansas City, Missouri

1970
M.F.A. Yale University School of Art
and Architecture
studied with James Rosati

1970
Alice Kimball English Traveling Fellowship
Yale University, New Haven

1970-71
Instructor in Bronze Casting
Cooper Union, New York

1971-present
Teaches Sculpture
State University College, New Paltz

1973, 1975
Faculty Research Fellowship and
Grant-in-Aid
University Awards Committee
State University of New York

Exhibitions

1967
MID-AMERICA, Nelson Art Gallery
Kansas City, Missouri

1970
Yale University Art Gallery, Graduate Show

1970
Steven Radich Gallery, New York

1970
Albright-Knox Lending Gallery
Buffalo, New York

1971
Drawing Show with Peter Agostini
Steven Radich Gallery, New York

1971
NEW TALENT, A.M.Sachs Gallery, New York

1971
GALLERY GROUP SHOW
A.M. Sachs, New York

1971
One Man Show, A.M. Sachs, New York

1972
Painting and Sculpture 1972
Storm King Art Center, Mountainville,
New York

1972
ART ACQUISITIONS
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

1972
OUTDOOR SCULPTURE INDOORS
Storm King Art Center, Mountainville

1974
Sculpture in the Fields
Storm King Art Center, Mountainville

1975
Invitational Sculpture Exhibition
Galerie Ariadne, New York

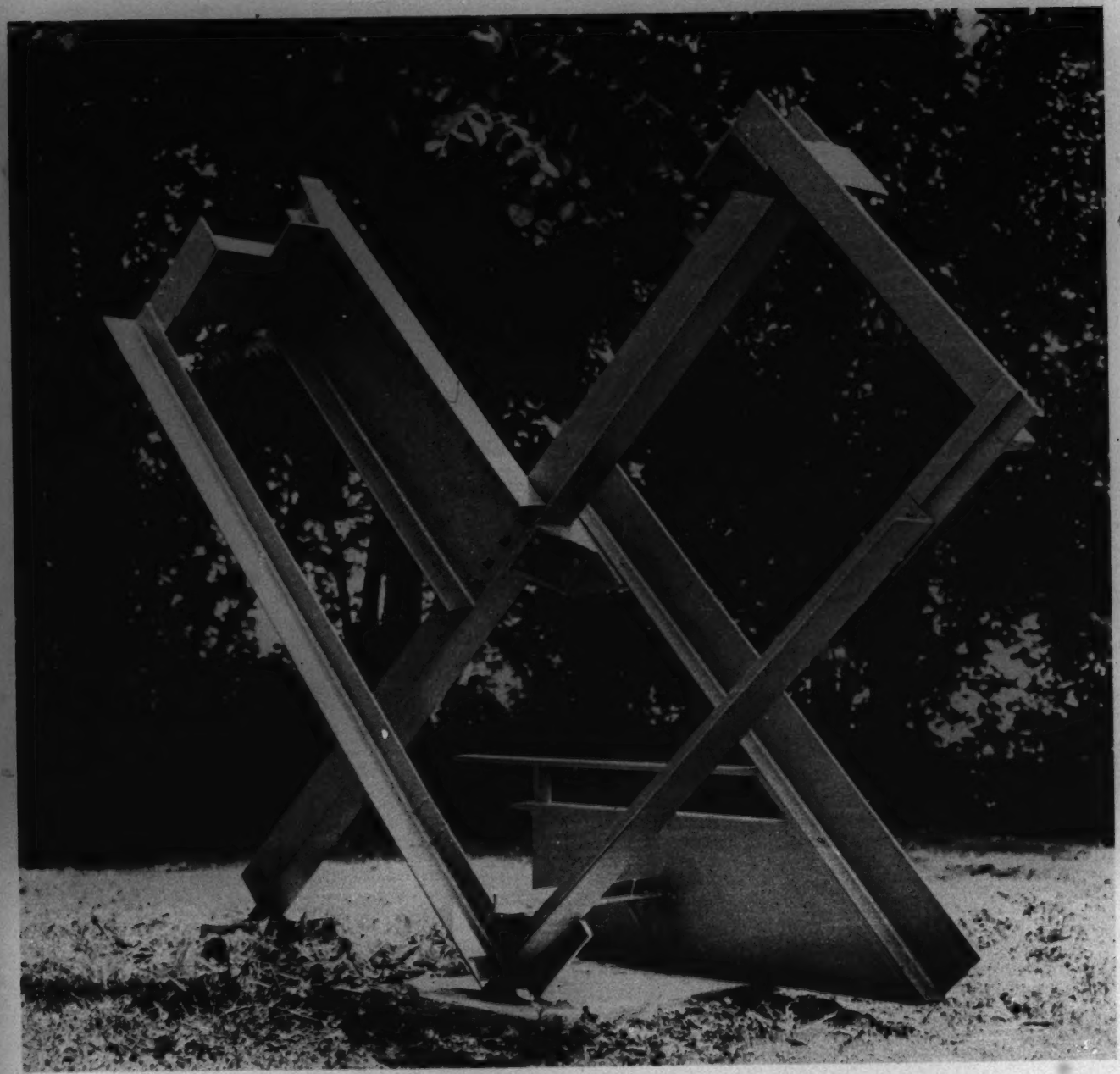
1975
Process Sculpture
State University College
Cortland, New York

1975
One Man Show, Vassar College Art Gallery
Poughkeepsie, New York

1976
West Side Sculpture Show, New York City

Eagle's Nest, 1975, steel, 9 X 10 X 22 inches. Opposite: Zig Zag, 1973, steel, 102 X 54 X [illegible] inches

X Construction #3, 1975, steel, 67 X 94 X 24 inches



Catalogue

1976
University Art Gallery
State University of New York
at Albany

1
Construction Based on X
1971
Steel
27 X 28 X 4 inches

2
Green P
1972
Steel
48 X 80 X 96 inches

3
90 Degree Construction
1972
Steel
24 X 65 X 65 inches

4
Mustang
1972
Steel
16 X 89 X 29 inches

5
Zig Zag
1973
Steel
102 X 54 X 18 inches

6
X Construction#1
1974
Steel
93 X 100 X 20 inches

7
X Construction#2
1974
Steel
105 X 106 X 26 inches

8
X Construction#3
1975
Steel
67 X 94 X 24 inches

9
Jack-in-the-Pulpit
1975
Steel
32 X 42 X 13 inches

10
Eagle's Nest
1975
Steel
9 X 19 X 22 inches

11
Prop Pick
1975
Steel
33 X 36 X 23 inches

12
Slant
1976
Steel
90 X 96 X 15 inches

13
Horizontal Pulpit
1976
Steel
32 X 80 X 29 inches

14
Spring Relief
1976
Cast Bronze
12 X 13 X 5 inches

15
Deck Relief
1976
Cast Bronze
7 X 9 X 9 inches

16
Pulpit#2
1976
Cast Bronze
9-1/2 X 6 X 6 inches

17
Deck Fin
1976
Cast Bronze
7 X 12 X 4 inches

18
Fin Deck
1976
Cast Bronze
5-1/2 X 10 X 4 inches

19
Wing
1976
Cast Bronze
7 X 8 X 6 inches

20
Spring Relief#2
1976
Cast Bronze
10 X 8 X 4 inches

21
Peterbuilt
1976
Cast Bronze
9 X 10 X 7 inches

22
Cascade
1976
Steel
84 X 63 X 32 inches

23
Study for X Relation
1975
Drawing, mixed media
24 X 38 inches

24
Diagonal City
1975
Drawing, mixed media
24 X 38 inches

25
Diagonal City#2
1975
Drawing, mixed media
24 X 38 inches

26
A-Span
1975
Drawing, mixed media
21-1/2 X 30 inches

27
A-Span#2
1975
Drawing, mixed media
21-1/2 X 30 inches

28
Study for X Relation#2
1975
Drawing, mixed media
24 X 38 inches

29
Study for X Realtion#3
1975
Drawing, mixed media
24 X 38 inches

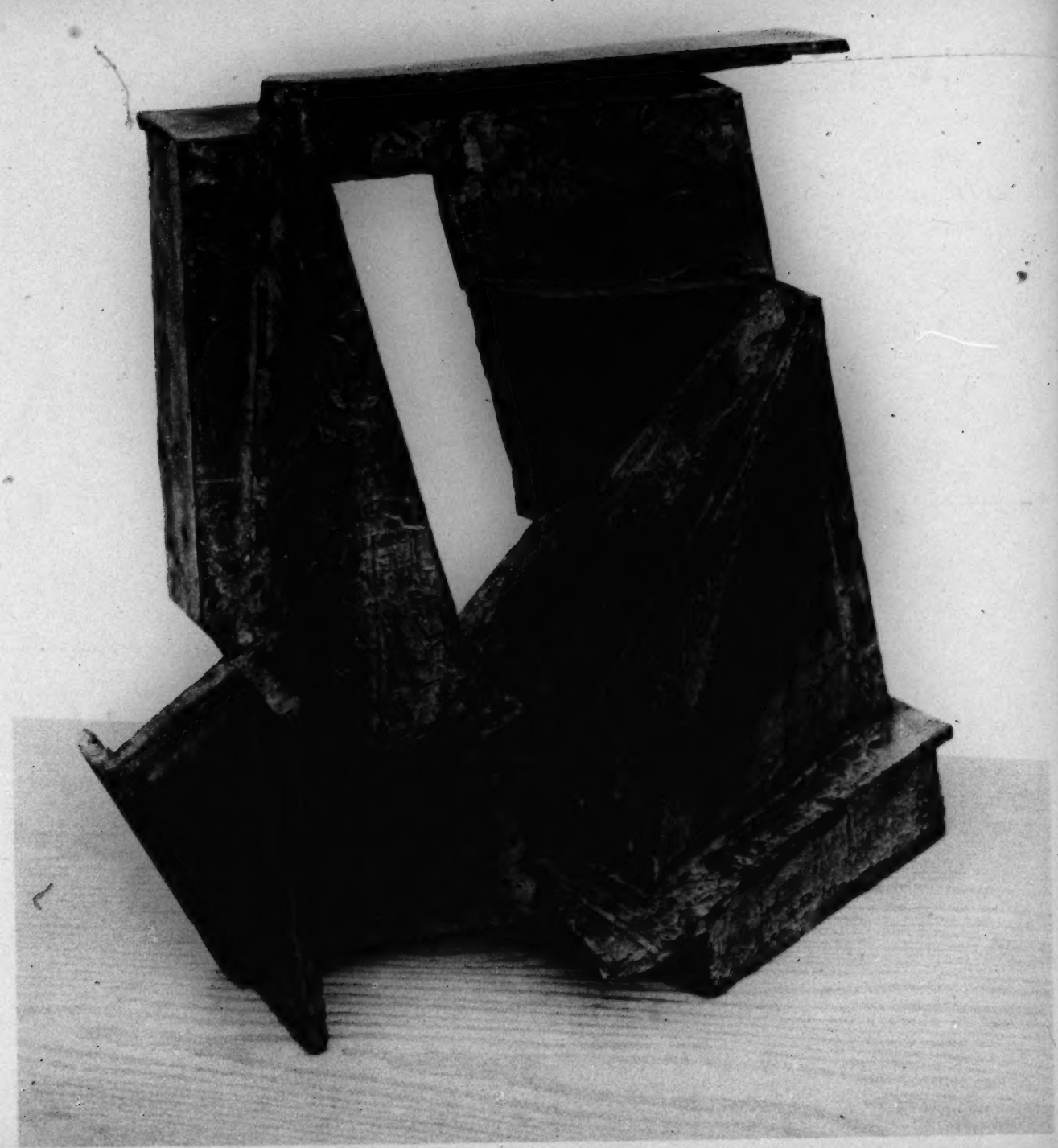
30
Over 3
1972
Drawing, mixed media
24 X 38 inches

31
Study for X Construction#2
1973
Drawing, mixed media
24 X 19 inches

32
Study for Zig Zag
1973
Drawing, mixed media
15 X 22 inches

33
Study for 90 Degree Construction
1972
Drawing, mixed media
20 X 26 inches

Pulpit #2, 1976, cast bronze, 9-1/2 X 6 X 6 inches



Spring Relief, 1976, cast bronze, 12 X 13 X 5 inches

University Art Gallery
State University of New York at Albany
1400 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12222

Don Mochon, Nancy Liddle, directors
John Wisniewski, chief of installations
Mindy Bailin, assistant to the directors

credits:
Linn Sage, for the photograph of John Ferro
John Ferro, for photographs of the sculpture
Raphael Worshaw, for photographs of the drawings

opposite: X Construction #1, 1974,
steel, 93 X 100 X 20 inches